



# EMPLOYMENT LAND STATEMENT

Prepared in support to a Hybrid Planning Application for a New Business Park at the  
Bridgeway Centre, Wrexham Industrial Estate

On behalf of FI Real Estate Management Ltd

JANUARY 2022

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Wrexham Industrial Estate is a strategically important employment area and location accessible to Wrexham and the wider North East Wales market region. It provides considerable, on-going potential as a focus for investment for provision of employment floorspace and employment opportunities.
- 1.2 Wrexham County Borough has an acknowledged need for more employment sites and developments to encourage new businesses and enterprises. This requires the expansion of provision of suitable, modern industrial units that are fit for purpose to flexibly accommodate a range of enterprises to support growth of businesses and business sectors.
- 1.3 Wrexham Industrial Estate is no exception as a location to provide such development, indeed it is imperative that investment is made to ensure there is a supply of job opportunities in growing industrial sectors.
- 1.4 Reuse of existing employment sites serves planning policy objectives and encourages the regeneration and re-use of existing brownfield sites which are still suitable and needed for new employment uses.
- 1.5 The application site is currently not well used. It is inefficiently laid out. Its existing buildings and units are old, outdated and fail to meet needs of both current and potential future occupiers.
- 1.6 The site provides potential for redevelopment for a range of industrial units (Use Classes B1, B2 and B8) for which there is a strong demand at the site / the Estate.
- 1.7 The proposed development will improve and contribute significantly to the supply of industrial units serving the local and sub-regional area and meet related demand.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This employment land statement has been prepared by Plan Red and FI Real Estate Management Ltd (“FIREM”) in support of FIREM’s hybrid planning application to Wrexham Council (“council”) for detailed and outline planning permission for new employment development, circulation, revised access arrangements, ecology mitigation and ancillary development (“proposed development”) at the Bridgeway Centre off Bridge Road at Wrexham Industrial Estate, Wrexham, LL13 9QS (“application site”).
- 2.2 The planning application proposals were submitted to the council in draft form for comment through the council’s pre-application service. This was in late 2020 and a formal response was provided in April 2021. Feedback provided relating to the profile, proposed use and operation of the proposed development was taken into account by FIREM through the design process applying to its then, still evolving proposals.
- 2.3 In addition, by reference to section 61Z of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*, Part 1A of the *Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012* (the “Order”) and guidance provided by the Welsh Government in the ‘*New Development Management Procedures*’ letter issued in February 2016, as the proposed development falls within the category of ‘major development’ as set out in the Order, the application was subject to pre-application consultation (“PAC”). Comments and feedback provided through the PAC process are set out in the Neighbour and Community Consultation Report prepared by Plan Red. No comments provided relate to the topics this statement covers.
- 2.4 The statement is to be read in conjunction with the drawings pack by MCAU depicting the proposed development and supporting documents dealing with planning and land use topics, the most relevant of which are the Planning Statement by Plan Red and Design and Access Statement by MCAU.
- 2.5 The scope of the statement is as follows
- Section 3 sets out background on the provision and availability of employment land and premises in the district and Wrexham Industrial Estate.
  - Section 4 sets out information on local market consideration.



- Section 5 sets out key drivers and current employment floorspace/unit needs in the district and Wrexham Industrial describes the application site and its immediate vicinity.
- Section 6 sets out conclusions on the matters addressed by the statement.

### 3 OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT LAND, PREMISES AND TRENDS

- 3.1 Our consideration of the Council's *Topic Paper 2 - Economy and Employment, February 2016*, to the *Wrexham Local Development Plan 2013 - 2028* and work by FIREM's in-house commercial team and FIREM's commercial advisors confirms the following:

#### Local Contexts

- 3.2 Wrexham County Borough's economy has been transformed in the past twenty years from one dominated by heavy and traditional industry into a major high tech manufacturing technology and services hub.
- 3.3 Wrexham's location, just 45 minutes' drive from major airports in Manchester and Liverpool and 90 minutes from Birmingham makes it well connected to most of the UK, through road and rail links, including train services direct to and from London.
- 3.4 The Bidston railway corridor provides a sustainable link between Wrexham and Deeside and also provides connections with the Wirral and the wider Liverpool city. Wrexham General also provides a direct train link to Cardiff and Chester, with the Chester Station linking to Manchester and London.
- 3.5 Wrexham County Borough is part of the Mersey Dee Alliance ("MDA"), a partnership which supports strategic economic activity within the North East Wales, West Cheshire and Wirral areas. Wrexham is therefore well placed to tap into economic opportunities in both Wales and North West England.

#### Economic Activity

- 3.6 Like most urban centres Wrexham has suffered from UK wide recessions and changing shopping habits resulting from internet and 'click and collect' shopping options. Footfall in the town centre has dropped by 28.3% since 2010 compared to the national average of 20%. And whilst it remains a concern, compared to UK average there is a lower proportion of empty shops on Wrexham's "High Street."
- 3.7 The County Borough is characterised by fairly high levels of economic activity, 74% compared to 71.4% across North Wales and 68.9% for the whole of Wales. Unemployment as a percentage of the area's economically active population is 6.5% compared to 6.9% for North Wales and 7.9% for the whole of Wales. In part this is due

to the existence of, and the range of employment opportunities offered at, Wrexham Industrial Estate (“WIE”).

- 3.8 It is FIREM’s experience that demand for good quality, reasonably priced, well profiled and modern employment units for Use Classes B1, B2 and B8, available on traditional and flexible lease arrangements at WIE, remains very strong (2020/21), and if anything is likely to grow.

### Types of Jobs

- 3.9 The highest proportion of jobs within Wrexham County are within Public Administration, Education and Health sectors at 35%, with the second and third highest in Manufacturing at 19.6% and Motor Trade, Wholesale and Retail at 15.7% respectively. Clearly of the 19.6% of jobs in manufacturing, a substantial proportion are located at WIE.

### Premises

- 3.10 The current structure of the availability of premises is strongly geared towards industrial, with the bulk of this stock being located at Wrexham and Llay Industrial Estates.
- 3.11 WIE is the UK's second largest industrial estate in the UK and among the largest in Europe. It provides a good range of industrial units and many, including a number owned by FIREM, have been created through the redevelopment of older, first generation units, so as to provide more modern and fit for purpose units. By more modern and fit for purpose we mean units with more generous floor to ceiling clearances, large secure gates/doors, dedicated service yards and car parking, unencumbered operational areas, (some with integral offices), and clad portal steel frame buildings which are easier and lower cost to maintain. Older first generation stock is becoming less popular with tenants and rentals have and will continue to fall given the generally poor quality of the accommodation provided and limitations as to how it can be used.
- 3.12 The remainder of the industrial estates in the County Borough are located around the A483 corridor to the west of the town.
- 3.13 Wrexham Town also has a significant supply of offices, which are focused in the north west from the town centre up to the Garden Village neighbourhood and include most of Glyndŵr University and Coleg Cambria. There is also a focus in the south west of the town, which includes Wrexham Technology Park.

## Where the Local Workforce Works

- 3.14 Figures from 2012 (Welsh Government statistics), now dated but used to support the evidence base of the WLDP, showed that 29% of workers commuted out of Wrexham – comparable to the North Wales average. The highest percentage of commuter outflows were to Cheshire West and Chester of 9.8% (6,200). Similarly, the highest number of in-commuter flows were from CWAC at 7% (4,200) closely followed by Flintshire 6.5% (3,900) and Shropshire 5.8% (3,500). A substantial proportion of those of working age living in Wrexham are employed by businesses based on WIE.

## Land Requirement and Demand

- 3.15 The Employment Land Review 2015 (“ELR”) found the existing supply strongly focussed on the WIE with over two-thirds of land located on the Estate (141.07 ha of the total 204.91 ha).
- 3.16 However, the net supply figure on the Estate reduces to 56.04 hectares once sites with constraints or reserved for business expansion are taken into account. Regarding constraints, many of these are linked to the perceived ecological value of parts of the Estate.
- 3.17 Wrexham Town and the Technology Park are the primary office market locations with Wrexham and have the greatest supply of vacant office space (52% of available floorspace), across a wide range of accommodation sizes.
- 3.18 The employment land supply is monitored by the Council on an annual basis. The Topic Paper summarises the supply information updated to a 1st April 2015 base date (Table 1 extract below).

**Table1**

|              | Supply as at 31/3/14 (ELR) |            | Supply as at 1/4/2015 |            |
|--------------|----------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
|              | Gross Supply               | Net Supply | Gross Supply          | Net Supply |
| <b>WIE</b>   | 141.07h                    | 56.04h     | 141.72h               | 56.69h     |
| <b>Other</b> | 63.84h                     | 24.61h     | 63.84h                | 19.51h     |
| <b>Total</b> | 204.91h                    | 80.65h     | 205.56h               | 76.2h      |

- 3.19 The availability of an existing employment land supply was not therefore identified as a major issue in Wrexham in the ELR for the purposes of setting an employment land requirement through the emerging WLDP. The supply envisaged some 53% of the net

supply able to be brought forward within a 5 year period, and some 23.75 hectares were immediately available.

- 3.20 However, the ELR did identify that while in theory the County Borough as a whole has sufficient land to meet its needs, qualitative research undertaken indicates a growing land supply shortfall, relating to identified land on the Wrexham Industrial Estate.
- 3.21 The review found a continuing strong demand for sites on the Estate and a shortfall of readily available land on which to create an offer for the future marketing of the Estate to inward investors or existing businesses.
- 3.22 Furthermore, the development of the North Wales prison on the Estate has had the effect of boosting market demand at the Estate as supply chain and affiliated companies seek to locate/ expand close to the facility.
- 3.23 The above is certainly the experience of FIREM. In its experience there is not only a shortage of readily available land but there is also a shortage of good quality modern industrial units that fall within the small to medium floorspace range, and which are available on flexible lease term arrangements. By this we mean opportunities for start-up businesses and enterprises taking their first unit/floorspace in smaller units, to then expand into a larger unit once the business grows and so on. This is what FIREM terms accommodating cradle to adulthood floorspace needs.
- 3.24 It is also FIREM's experience and that of its agents that there is an increasing general shortage of undeveloped/greenfield land at WIE for employment development that falls into the categories of medium to large scale units which offer potential to accommodate larger businesses enterprises.
- 3.25 Regarding the increasing shortage of new development land at WIE, the ELR therefore recommended (para.11.11) that consideration be given to identifying additional land at the Estate, and a related need to allocate a further 20-30 hectares in the LDP at WIE (net of any ecological constraints). This was in order to provide sites which can meet both the needs of larger existing businesses that have outgrown their existing units and for land to be marketed to future investors with demand for larger units/sites. This would take the overall employment land requirement proposed in the ELR and for promotion through the LDP to between 50.9 and 60.9 hectares. These figures therefore are generally consistent with the employment land requirement figure of 52.9 hectares derived from Welsh Government projections.

## 4 LOCAL MARKET CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Based on work undertaken by FIREM and its agents; reflecting on FIREM's experiences as a developer and landlord nationwide, including at Wrexham Industrial Estate; and also reflecting on approaches to both by businesses and enterprises wishing to take new floorspace/units, FIREM's view of the local employment land and premises market along with local demand in 2020 / 2021 (first half) is as follows:

- There continues to be a steady flow of enquiries for modern and fit for purpose industrial units at WIE.
- Modern and fit for purpose industrial units are defined as follows:
  - Unencumbered operational floorspace.
  - High floor to ceiling clearances (can be anywhere between 6-12m (at this site it is 6-8m for the type of unit being promoted)).
  - Large doors/gates.
  - High security with roller shutter doors.
  - Dedicated yard/service areas.
  - Dedicated car parking.
  - Integral offices in larger units.
  - Integral w/c and related employee accommodation.
  - Easy access to/from main access serving site.
- The size of units for which there is currently good demand is as roughly follows:
  - 93 sqm (1,000 sq. ft.) GIA floorspace.
  - 139 sqm (1,500 sq. ft.) GIA floorspace.
  - 279 sqm (3,000 sq. ft.) GIA floorspace
  - 464 sqm (5,000 sq. ft.) GIA floorspace
  - 743 sqm (8,000 sq. ft.) GIA floorspace
- The types of leases that occupiers generally want are as follows:
  - 5 years with incentives and break clause after 3 years.



- 10 years with incentives and break clauses after 5 years.
  - 15 years with incentives after 5 and 10 years.
- Demand for new larger units but delivered through bespoke new build on undeveloped land.
- Generally, while there continues to be demand for older more constrained units in terms of type of accommodation, issues with these types of units, as expressed by current and potential occupiers, is as follows:
  - Low ceiling height is an issue.
  - Encumbered working areas is an issue.
  - Generally limited scope for flexible use
  - Doors/gates too small.
  - Maintenance costs high.
  - Perception issues.

## 5 KEY DRIVERS AND CURRENT FLOORSPEACE / LAND NEEDS

5.1 As identified through the Topic Paper and reflecting the experiences and hopes of FIREM and its agents regarding the need for additional land and more modern and flexible industrial floorspace and units at WIE, the following key points and drivers are identified as of relevance to and supporting the proposed development proposed under the planning application:

- Wrexham is a key settlement of national importance and in regional terms and one that through WIE offers considerable potential as a continuing focus for investment in future employment floorspace and units.
- The County Borough, reflecting its history and primary industries that dominated in previous years, continues to be over-represented in declining economic sectors such as heavy engineering and related manufacturing. It needs more sites and developments that can accommodate new businesses and enterprises in those sectors that will buck historic trends and sectors.
- The quality and diversity of the town's employment offer, including that at WIE, needs expanding and improving, including through the provision of a range of modern, fit for purpose industrial units, including units that can be taken on flexible lease terms.
- The council needs to provide targets on land provision for employment uses to ensure that the County Borough continues to provide the right type of employment land, in the right location to enable new businesses to locate in Wrexham and take advantage of its strategically accessible location within the wider North East Wales and North West England market region. This includes at WIE which is a nationally and regionally important industrial zone.
- Encourage and try to ensure that there is a supply of jobs to support a growing industrial sector.
- Assist the current and growing workforce in the County Borough and surrounding area by providing economic development opportunities at key locations and site like WIE to allow existing businesses to expand and grow and for new enterprises to take units to facilitate growth and expansion.
- Protect existing employment sites and encourage the regeneration and re-use of existing brownfield sites which are still suitable and needed for employment but

which also offer potential to be redeveloped to provide new, modern, fit for purpose employment units.

- Make sure that those parts of the County Borough that experience high levels of multiple deprivation, which includes parts of Wrexham, have good access to employment land and units and that there are opportunities for growth.
- Support economic and employment growth alongside social and environmental considerations.
- Facilitate regeneration and promote social and environmental sustainability by co-ordinating development with employment opportunities to disadvantaged communities.
- Focus investment to attract funding / partnerships to deliver improvements on links between the wider Wrexham conurbation and WIE, including consideration of multi-modal freight links and walking / cycling infrastructure as a means of commuting for workers.

5.2 Turning to the Bridgeway site, the focus of the future planning application, the following factors and attributes displayed illustrate the need for its comprehensive redevelopment to meet the identified drivers of floorspace and employment land needs:

- There is demand at WIE for a range of industrial units (size / scale)
- That demand stretches across Use Classes B1, B2 and B8
- The site is currently not well used, nor used efficiently, because the existing buildings / unit stock is old and outdated and does not meet needs of current occupiers, nor is attractive to future occupiers
- The site provides redevelopment potential to better provide a range of modern, fit for purpose, industrial units to meet demand across Use Classes B1, B2 and B8 sought at WIE
- The proposed development will improve and contribute significantly to the supply of industrial units serving the local and sub-regional area and meet related demand

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Wrexham is a key settlement of national importance and regionally as a focus for economic activity. Wrexham Industrial Estate (“WIE”) is a strategically important employment area and location accessible to Wrexham and the wider North East Wales market region. It provides considerable, on-going potential as a focus for investment for provision of employment floorspace and employment opportunities.
- 6.2 Wrexham County Borough has an acknowledged need for more employment sites and developments to encourage new businesses and enterprises, and to diversify away from historic heavy industrial and manufacturing activities. This requires the expansion of provision of suitable, modern industrial units that are fit for purpose to flexibly accommodate a range of enterprises to support growth of businesses and business sectors. And by flexible it means not just units adaptable to a range of uses but units available to business on flexible lease terms to allow for change and growth.
- 6.3 Wrexham Industrial Estate needs expanding and improvement through new investment because of its strategic economic importance. Indeed it is imperative that investment is made to ensure there is a supply of job opportunities. This serves wider planning policy objectives to protect existing employment sites and to encourage the regeneration and re-use of existing brownfield sites which are still suitable and needed for new employment uses.
- 6.4 The application site is currently not well used. It is inefficiently laid out. Its existing buildings and units are old, outdated and fail to meet needs of both current and potential future occupiers.
- 6.5 The site provides potential for redevelopment for a range of industrial units (Use Classes B1, B2 and B8) for which there is a strong demand at the site / WIE.
- 6.6 The proposed development will improve and contribute significantly to the supply of industrial units serving the local and sub-regional area and meet related demand.